

Introduction

Spaces of digital citizenship in Africa

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Digital citizenship, put simply, is the use of mobile and internet technologies to participate in civic and political life. African citizens increasingly use digital technologies including mobile phones, the internet and social media to interact with their social, economic and political environments as digital citizens. This digital citizenship is enabled by the new action possibilities afforded by digital technologies to instantly share text, images and video with millions of people locally and globally. Digital technologies enable citizens to form groups, share experience and information, without dependencies on establishment media or political institutions. However, access to digital devices, connectivity and the digital literacies needed to make effective use of these opportunities is not evenly distributed. Notwithstanding this inequality of access, digital technologies are being used by millions across Africa to engage in new forms of civic engagement and political participation.

Although there is a growing body of literature on activist use of social media in Africa (Mudhai et al. 2009; Ekine 2010, Frère 2011; Mutsvairo 2016; Willems and Mano 2017; Dwyer and Molony 2019), there is very little existing research that focuses explicitly on digital citizenship in Africa. This leaves open important questions about how the widespread use of digital technologies is affecting the nature of African citizenship, how it is enhancing or impeding engagement in different forms of citizenship and the extent to which it amplifies the power of citizens, the state and private companies. This book makes a modest contribution to addressing this under-researched area by providing the first collected edition of case studies from across the continent

on digital citizenship in Africa. It aims to build bridges between media studies, citizenship studies, development studies and African studies.

In this research project we set out to understand the continuities and discontinuities between citizenship and digital citizenship in Africa and how the positive openings it generates are now being constrained by forms of digital authoritarianism and surveillance capitalism (MacKinnon 2011; Zuboff 2019). While digital technologies have often been characterized as enabling democratic openings in Africa, scholars are now also documenting their use in new forms of digital repression (Choudry 2019; Feldstein 2021). Old antagonisms familiar from the offline world are now emerging in online spaces, often evident as contestation between various forms of digital citizenship and digital authoritarianism (Mudhai 2009; Roberts and Bosch 2021). The aim of this book is to illuminate this dynamic through a range of case studies from different African countries viewed through the lens of digital citizenship. A deeper examination of core elements of digital authoritarianism will be the focus of the next two books in this series: *Digital Disinformation in Africa* and *Digital Surveillance in Africa*.

In our previous work with colleagues at the African Digital Rights Network we analysed how citizens from ten different African countries made creative use of digital technologies to open up new civic space online (Roberts and Mohamed Ali 2021). In each country we also documented the growing range of repressive uses of digital technologies to close down online civic space (Roberts et al. 2021). The use of digital technologies has undoubtedly enhanced people's ability to collectively organize and to make rights claims to government and other powerholders, but the state has gradually gained influence over digital spaces and is becoming adept in its use for social control (Nyabola 2018; McGee et al. 2018; Hintz et al. 2019). All of our digital acts, mobile calls, payments, likes and retweets leave digital traces that enable state and corporate surveillance, targeting, manipulation and control. The increasing trend of state-ordered surveillance, online disinformation and internet shutdowns represents new forms of digital authoritarianism that shrink the space for democratic citizen engagement (Freedom House 2018; Mare 2020).

In this book we argue for an understanding of digital citizenship as an active process, in which citizens use mobile and internet technologies to take

part in the social, economic and political life of communities of which they are a part. Each chapter analyses a different episode of active digital citizenship to extend our understanding of distinctive aspects of digital citizenship in Africa. Each episode of digital citizenship featured in the book involves citizens using digital technologies to influence policies, claim rights or hold governments to account. Collectively, the authors investigate how mobile and internet technologies are being used both *positively* by citizens to expand democratic space online and *negatively* by states to shrink or shut down that civic space. Not all countries in Africa are covered in this collected edition; anglophone countries predominate. We hope to encourage other researchers to write about digital citizenship in other countries. The Digital Africa series itself will include more lusophone and francophone countries in future collected editions.

This introductory chapter first outlines key understandings of the concept of *citizenship*, and specific African conceptions of citizenship, which we use as a foundation for conceptualizations of *digital* citizenship in Africa. The book is not centrally concerned with citizenship in the sense of a status bestowed by states on individuals; it is instead concerned with the active process of civic and political engagement irrespective of official status. We are also concerned with how citizens access and make active and effective use of digital technologies in civic engagement and political life. Authors place each case study in historical and political context to understand how structural factors shape digital citizenship. We are interested in the specific affordances that digital technologies provide for African citizenship and in the affordances they provide for digital authoritarianism. Once we have established this theoretical framework, the remainder of this introduction briefly outlines the contributions of each chapter, showing how authors illuminate our understanding of the dynamic and contested spaces for digital citizenship in Africa. Each chapter illustrates how the use of digital technologies is being employed both to enlarge and to shrink the available space for digital citizenship.

Conceptions of citizenship

Definitional debates about citizenship have implications for our understanding of digital citizenship. We therefore begin with a review of the debates about

citizenship and African citizenship, before moving on to explore digital citizenship and digital citizenship in Africa.

Citizenship has been widely contested at both a definitional and conceptual level. Many scholars distinguish between liberal, republican and communitarian conceptions of citizenship. Liberal conceptions of citizenship see it as a status bestowed upon individuals by the state, providing them with rights, with the role of the state being to protect the ability of individuals to pursue their own self-interests. Republican conceptions of citizenship see it as a set of obligations individuals have to participate in government – a process of active civic engagement in policy debates, decision-making and elections. Communitarian conceptions of citizenship emphasize community affiliation rather than individual rights or obligations to the state, arguing that the social relations and loyalties that people have as part of sub-national groups are often more meaningful and practically significant than abstract rights and distant political processes. As we will argue, this communitarian perspective resonates with some African conceptions of citizenship that emphasize the importance of ethnic, religious or language groups above affiliation to the state.

Citizenship does not occur in a vacuum; it is expressed in spaces and places (Jones and Gaventa 2002), and the specific historic, cultural and power relationships of those spaces inevitably shape the temporal and situated meaning and practices of citizenship in those places. This makes the situated study of citizenship in particular geographies and within specific groups essential to a full understanding of digital citizenship in Africa.

Active citizenship

One aspect that is contested in the literature is whether citizenship is better understood as a status bestowed upon an individual by the state and to which rights and obligations are attached or as an agency-based process of participation in political and civic life. Narrowly and legally defined, citizenship involves the entitlement to carry a passport or national identity document, which brings associated entitlements such as the right to vote and associated obligations such as respecting laws and norms. However, such legal-political definitions of citizenship are, in practice, constantly being challenged and renegotiated due to globalization, migration and when

countries join or leave economic and trading blocs. It is also now affected by the advent of online communities and platforms that enable borderless online commerce, employment, education and politics. Gaventa (2010) suggests that neoliberalism and globalization increasingly frame citizens as passive consumers, users and beneficiaries and instead argues for a conception of citizens as active producers and rights-bearers. This view recognizes the colonial and exclusionary origins of liberal and republican practices of citizenship but instead asserts everyday practices of citizenship that express relatedness, belonging, solidarity and demands for dignity, right and social justice (Nyamu-Musembi 2006; Gaventa 2010).

Marshall defined citizenship as 'a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community' (1950: 28). By defining citizenship in relation to membership of a 'community' rather than a nation state, it becomes possible to conceive of citizenship of various collectives on local or global scales based on affiliations including (but not limited to) those of proximity, culture, values, gender, ethnic group, class, caste or religion. People are generally members of more than one such community. However, Marshall's account of citizenship places insufficient emphasis on the processes necessary to attain and defend it. The rights that we have are themselves the outcome of ongoing active citizenship such as the women's suffrage, civil rights and labour rights movements, as well as the contemporary #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter and #ENDSARS movements. Jones and Gaventa (2002) argue that to be meaningful, any conception of citizenship should carry with it a conception of rights. Lister (2003) defines this form of active citizenship as the process of bringing neglected issues into the public realm in acts of rights-claiming.

Nyamu-Musembi (2006) also argues for the need for citizenship to focus on actors' agency, pointing out that such 'actor-orientated perspectives are based on the recognition that rights are shaped through actual struggles informed by people's own understandings of what they are entitled to'. A focus on citizenship as an ongoing *process* and not just the *product* of state decisions positions people as active participants in the ongoing project of exercising, defending and claiming rights rather than as passive recipients of status bestowed by the state. From this perspective, the #hashtag campaigns and digital openings/closings considered in this book can be seen as examples of such active citizenship processes involving the exercise, defence and claiming of rights.

From this perspective, Naila Kabeer (2005) argues, the history of citizenship can be viewed as the history of struggle over how it should be defined and who and what it includes or excludes. Definitions of citizenship consign 'certain groups within a society to the status of lesser citizens or of non-citizens, and on the struggles by such groups to redefine, extend and transform "given" ideas about rights, duties and citizenship. They therefore help to shed light on what inclusive citizenship might mean when it is viewed from the standpoint of the excluded' (Kabeer 2005: 1). As the case studies in this book illustrate, citizenship is a double-edged sword that can be used to both include and exclude, and can be used as means of resistance or discipline 'Citizenship is frequently used to exclude "outsiders" through the drawing and policing of boundaries of citizenship and residence . . . [this] does not invalidate citizenship's use as a progressive political and analytical tool' (Lister 2003: 8).

In principle, every citizen enjoys the same citizenship rights and entitlements. In practice, access to these entitlements is uneven, in ways that are often structured along familiar dimensions of (dis)advantage, including gender, ethnicity and class. Achieving these rights and entitlements is not automatic, especially for disadvantaged communities. The ability to exercise, defend and expand these rights depends on an ongoing process of active citizenship.

Conceptions of African citizenship

The earlier conceptions of citizenship draw primarily from academic debates in the Global North. African scholars provide alternative conceptions of citizenship essential to understanding digital citizenship in Africa and of particular relevance for this volume. Ekeh (1975) claims that the colonial context of African politics informs its distinct conceptions of citizenship. He argues that citizenship acquires a variety of meanings depending on whether it is conceived in terms of what he refers to as the primordial public or the civic public. The primordial public is the indigenous moral order of communal identity and obligations, and the civic public is the idea of a nation state involving rights and national taxes that were originally imposed under colonialism and later institutionalized by local elites in constitutions and political settlements following independence. In relation to the primordial

public, Ekeh (1975) argues that African citizens have moral obligations to contribute and perform duties at the level of extended family or ethnic group in exchange for the intangible benefits of identity and the psychological security of belonging. Ekeh argues that the structure of the civic public is different and amoral. 'A good citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return; a lucky citizen of the civic public gains from the civic public but enjoys escaping giving anything in return whenever he can' (Ekeh 1975: 108). These two elements of African citizenship are distinct from Western conceptions.

More recently, in *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani (1996) analyses the colonial roots of African citizenship, arguing that during occupation, a white colonial elite of settlers were 'citizens' privileged politically, economically and culturally, while the colonized Black majority were devalued 'subjects'. Mamdani argues that the lives of white citizens were shaped by modern law, religion and formal employment, while the lives of Black subjects were shaped by customary law, beliefs and the informal economy. Mamdani argues that civic power in post-colonial Uganda was deracialized but not detribalized, with the result that rural Ugandans remained subject to the power of customary law and loyal to their ethnic-religious group rather than to national law and universal citizenship. Writing about citizenship in the post-independence period, Ayoade (1988) analysed some of the socialist, one-party and president-for-life political settlements, concluding that many were 'states without citizens', that is, members remained subjects rather than citizens as they lacked the ability to use citizenship to exercise constitutional rights and effectively secure state responsiveness to their needs and priorities.

Nyamnjoh (2006) argues that the dominant Western literature tends to emphasize universal 'civic' citizenship and rights at the expense of 'ethnic' conceptions of citizenship, 'thereby downplaying the hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion informed by race, ethnicity, class, gender and geography that determine accessibility to citizenship in real terms' (Nyamnjoh 2006: 237). He argues that universal conceptions of citizenship are premised on a denial of existing hierarchies and inequalities of citizenship which 'insiders' impose on 'outsiders'. Nyamnjoh (2006) argues that 'There has been too much focus on "rights talk" and its "emancipatory rhetoric", and too little attention accorded to the contexts, meanings, and practices that make citizenship possible for some and a far-fetched dream for most'. Nyamnjoh's work provides a more

situated analysis of citizenship and draws attention to the processes by which different ethnic and gendered hierarchies of citizenship are constructed and reproduced in Africa.

To resolve these tensions Nyamnjoh suggests the introduction of 'flexible citizenship' (2006: 241). Nyamnjoh argues that political elites scapegoat immigrants as the reason for economic hardship. 'Citizens are made to believe that their best chance in life rests with reinforcing the distinction between them and . . . blaming migrants for their failures' (2006: 241). Like Flores and Benmayor's (1997) study of Latino citizenship and feminist research (Lister 2003; Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999), Nyamnjoh's research begins by identifying those who are excluded from citizenship and then taking their standpoint to understand how citizenship is unevenly experienced and contested. He writes that 'There is a clear need to reconceptualize citizenship in ways that create political, cultural, social and economic space for excluded nationals and non-nationals alike, as individuals and collectivities'. Such inclusion, he argues, 'is best guaranteed by a flexible citizenship unbounded by race, ethnicity, class, gender or geography, and that is both conscious and critical of hierarchies' (2006: 239).

These conceptions of African citizenship, from Ekeh and Mamdani to Ayoade and Nyamnjoh, in which affiliation to ethnic group predominates over nation state, are a feature of several chapters in this volume, most notably the chapters on Ethiopia and Nigeria.

Cultural citizenship

Another relevant and related conceptualization for this volume is the notion of cultural citizenship which combines active citizenship concepts with a form of ethnic citizenship. The term 'cultural citizenship' was coined by Latino scholars in the United States to articulate their experience of second-class citizenship in their own countries (Flores and Benmayor 1997). Their work examines the role that culture plays in citizenship and the role of active citizenship in shaping culture. In their research, 'cultural citizenship' refers to the agency of persons (whether formally classed as citizens or undocumented 'non-citizens') in processes or practices that assert their human, social or cultural rights. This includes political demands for equity, inclusion and full

participation, but the authors also include everyday cultural practices that play a part in producing social and cultural identity in their definition of cultural citizenship:

Cultural citizenship can be thought of as a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society and eventually claim rights . . . the motivation is simply to create space where the people feel 'safe' and 'at home', where they feel a sense of belonging and membership . . . the right to control space and to establish community is a central one. (Flores and Benmayor 1997: 15–16)

Flores and Benmayor chose to work with groups that were excluded from effective citizenship, and they focused on episodes of contestation where excluded groups were claiming space, producing identity, making rights claims and demanding to be heard. Their claims were often counter-hegemonic and met by opposition: 'creating social space and claiming rights can be oppositional and can lead to powerful redressive social movements . . . through these movements new citizens and new social actors are emerging, redefining rights, entitlements, and what it means to be a member of this society' (Flores and Benmayor 1997: 276).

Yuval-Davies and Werbner (1999: 2) highlight the fact that many communities are more passionately attached to their ethnic group than to their nationality, arguing that 'communities that privilege origin and culture thus tend to foster much deeper passions than those organised around notions of citizenship'. They define citizenship as much more than simply the formal relationship between an individual and the state; rather, it is 'a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging' (1999: 4). The perspective represented in their edited collection and a special edition of *Feminist Review* (No. 57, 1999) presents understandings of citizenship that recognize how gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, 'race', ability, and age mediate the construction of citizenship and determine access to entitlements and capacity to exercise independent agency. They conclude that despite its gendered history and tendency to exclude non-citizens, the concept of citizenship has potential value for a progressive politics that expands agency, rights and autonomy, if reimaged from a feminist perspective and in alliance with the labour movement and other disadvantaged groups (1999: 28–29).

Concepts of digital citizenship

The conceptualization of digital citizenship we present in this volume builds upon the concepts of citizenship described earlier. This section reviews the concepts of digital citizenship that we find most useful for interpreting how mobile and internet technologies are being used to participate in civic and political life in Africa.

Digital citizenship, put simply, is the process of participating in civic life using digital tools or in online spaces. Different digital tools and online platforms afford citizens different possibilities for civic action. Unlike citizenship, digital citizenship cannot be framed as a status bestowed upon individuals by the state. A person does not need permission from the state to become a digital citizen. Any citizen who makes active use of mobile and internet tools in their social, economic and political interactions is taking part in digital citizenship. They do, however, need to have access to digital tools, connectivity and digital literacies which are unevenly distributed; and because the majority of digital citizenship takes place on corporate social media platforms which can (and do) ban individuals, it is increasingly private corporations rather than the state who hold the power to enable and limit digital citizenship. Digital citizenship may or may not involve participation in formal politics, though not all online activity can be considered citizenship. Determining the parameters of what constitutes digital citizenship is contested as the following sections make clear.

We begin this section by reviewing the literature on the issues of digital access and digital affordances that are fundamental to digital citizenship. We then review definitions of digital citizenship, active digital citizenship and African digital citizenship before reflecting on the critical questions on digital citizenship in Africa that are answered in the case study chapters included in this volume.

Digital access to citizenship

Digital citizenship is predicated on access to digital technologies, connectivity and to the technical and civic skills needed to use them in social and political life. These issues of equitable access to technology are pertinent in all the countries

studied in this volume. Significant digital divides exist between continents, between countries within Africa and between different demographic groups within each country (Norris 2001; Mutula 2008; Van Dijk 2020). For example, access to the internet is at 95 per cent penetration in Nigeria and at 85 per cent penetration in Kenya, but it is less than at 20 per cent penetration in more than twenty African countries (statista.com 2021). Around the turn of the century, the digital development literature included a substantial focus on these 'digital divides' or uneven technology access within and between countries (Norris 2001; Castells 2002; Baskaran and Muchie 2006; Van Dijk 2006; Fuchs and Horak 2008; Unwin 2009).

Increasingly, this research goes 'beyond access' to examine the other necessary conditions to translate access into effective use (Gurstein 2003). Within any population, understanding the dimensions and dynamics of access to digital technologies is a matter of empirical investigation to establish exactly who enjoys availability of digital devices, for whom connectivity is affordable and who has the necessary awareness, abilities and agency to make effective use of digital technologies in civic life (Roberts and Hernandez 2019). Empirical investigation frequently shows that digital access is often delimited along intersectional lines. Women, and especially low-income rural women, are often the least connected (Ikolo 2013; Carboni et al. 2021). The case studies in this volume on Namibia and feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria analyse technology access to show the gendered hierarchies of digital citizenship.

Digital affordances for citizenship

Theoretically, the concept of affordances is often used to assess how different digital technologies make possible different social action. Originally used by Gibson (1977) to refer to the action possibilities suggested to the viewer by an object such as a handle, Norman (1988) appropriated the term to refer to those aspects of a technology that *invite, allow or enable* particular action possibilities for the user. Hutchby (2001: 444) reminds us that the affordances of technologies are only potentialities by defining affordances as 'aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object'. From this perspective it has been argued that social media has useful affordances for enabling citizens the action possibilities of immediate

global communication and the ability to create online spaces to self-organize, influence opinion at scale and project policy alternatives (Tufeki 2017; Earl and Kimport 2011). The use of affordances to analyse which technologies invite which action possibilities has become a feature of the digital development literature (Roberts 2017; Faith 2018).

Early literature emphasized the positive action possibilities afforded by digital technologies to enhance citizen voice and agency. Research documented how communities and issues that are under-represented in the establishment media, political parties and civil society could gain traction through networked organization (Benkler 2008; Shirky 2008). As each new generation of digital technology was appropriated for civic engagement, the empirical literature grew. This included, for example, studies on the use of SMS text messages in digital activism (Okolloh 2009; Ekine 2010), humanitarian action (Meier 2015; James and Taylor 2018), social media protest (Tufekci 2017; Egbunike 2018), civic technology (de Lanerolle et al. (2017), citizen-led accountability initiatives (McGee et al. 2018) and everyday digital citizenship (Bosch 2021).

Over this period, the early cyber-optimism of those who championed the digital as a means to reinvigorate citizen engagement (Negroponte 1995; Katz 1997) became tempered by the cyber-pessimism of those concerned by deepening divides, algorithmic discrimination and digital surveillance and disinformation (O'Neil 2016; Eubanks 2017; Hernandez and Roberts 2018; Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019). More recent scholarly attention has also focused on how the use of digital technologies reflects and reproduces existing exclusions and inequalities (O'Neil 2016; Eubanks 2017; Hernandez and Roberts 2018; Benjamin 2019) and how repressive governments are deploying technologies and tactics to close down online civic space (Oladapo and Ojebode 2021; Karekwaivanane and Msonza 2021). A new cyber-realism may now be emerging that provides theoretical tools able to analyse both the positive opportunities and negative consequences of digital citizenship (Isin and Ruppert 2015; McGee et al. 2018; Hintz et al. 2019; Roberts and Mohamed Ali 2021).

Digital citizenship defined

In the educational studies literature, digital citizenship involves a concern with teaching students to become safe and responsible online citizens. This

literature is largely focused on how to teach and measure student competencies in online etiquette, safety and the development of the skills necessary to enable learners to become online citizens (Ribble et al. 2004; Jones and Mitchell 2015; Nickel et al. 2020). This agenda is sometimes extended to include building the competencies of parents, teachers and the wider community (Bearden 2016). In some cases, the scope of digital citizenship in educational studies extends beyond concerns to developing students' digital literacies to include political literacies such as lessons in aspects of civic engagement and participation in democratic processes (Ribble 2015). In general, the media studies and citizenship studies literature are less concerned with the conformist issues of online etiquette and responsible digital citizenship and are predominantly focused on the reformist role of digital technologies in activism to influence social change.

Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008: 1) define digital citizenship as 'the ability to participate in society online'. Inclusion, civic participation and economic opportunity are their three metrics of the ability to participate online and, therefore, of digital citizenship. They define digital citizens as 'those who use technology frequently [daily], who use technology for political information to fulfil their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain' (2008: 2). To the extent that digital technologies thus facilitate inclusion, participation and economic opportunity, the authors, concerned with the US experience of digital citizenship, argue that the internet is essential to citizenship in the information age. Like other early literature on digital citizenship, they are generally optimistic about the potential benefits of digital technologies for social inclusion, civic participation and economic opportunity. Their research showed that voter turnout and economic opportunity were positively correlated with internet use, and they saw the potential for increased internet access to foster an increasingly informed population and increased civic engagement and economic growth. However, despite their optimistic outlook, their findings showed that affordable access and literacy skills are preconditions for benefiting from internet access. Their analysis showed that contrary to what was hoped, as internet access expanded, 'gaps based on race, ethnicity, and social economic status are not disappearing' (2008: 121), leading them to conclude that 'Social inequalities such as poverty, illiteracy, and unequal educational opportunities, prevent all Americans from enjoying full participation online and in society more generally' (2008: 157).

Active digital citizenship

Although much of the digital citizenship literature has been concerned with the important issues of technology access, digital literacies and effective use, a distinct strand of scholarship has focused on active digital citizenship: the use of digital technologies to make claims in relation to the state (Ekine 2010; Tufekci 2017; Ojebode and Oladapo 2018; Bosch 2021; Karekwaivanane and Monza 2021). Isin and Ruppert (2015: 44) argue that ‘what makes a subject a citizen is the capacity for making rights claims’ and that becoming digital citizens involves making rights claims through the internet. They argue that by performing rights claims (through speech acts), a person becomes a citizen and that by making rights claims online they become digital citizens. Isin and Ruppert (2015) adopt an active conception of digital citizenship arguing that ‘digital citizenship is best defined and understood through people’s actions, rather than by their formal status of belonging to a nation-state and the rights and responsibilities that come with it’.

This logic puts human agency at the centre of the analysis of citizenship. In legal-political analysis, rights (and internet access) are gifts bestowed upon passive citizens by the state. From this perspective, citizens are passive beneficiaries of rights that are bestowed upon them already fully formed by powerholders. Conversely, from the agency-based perspective of Isin and Ruppert, people can make claims to rights that do not yet exist or to rights that exist in theory but not in practice. They argue that it is the very agency of humans that is necessary to (re)create and (re)produce rights and citizenship through the processes of imagining them, digital speech acts to demand them and legal process to code them into law. It is through their digital acts of rights-claiming that people create the spaces for digital citizenship that contribute to processes of reform and transformation.

Isin and Ruppert (2015) argue that all digital acts take place in physical space by embodied citizens, but that they are qualitatively different from non-digital citizenship in several regards. First, they are not bounded by the borders of the nation state; a viral campaign can engage thousands of people in multiple nation states simultaneously. Second, digital acts are not bound by the same conventions of physical space; online communities have their own norms and conventions. Acts of digital citizenship cannot easily be contained within

existing 'borders and orders' and are not necessarily limited to the boundaries of the nation state but beyond to cyberspace (2015: xiii). By creating online spaces, digital citizens are able to develop new online norms and conventions in further acts of digital citizenship.

Isin and Ruppert (2015) go on to study particular types of digital citizens (citizen journalists, hackers, open-source activists) to analyse the novel digital acts and conventions of these new civic actors in creating openings of online civic space. They also look in detail at closings of online civic space such as digital filtering, surveillance and tracking. They argue that both openings and closings result from the (cyber)space of power relationships between online citizens and online conventions. In their analysis, digital citizenship and digital surveillance are not independent of each other but are part of the same ongoing contestation, in which breaking, calling out and contesting digital conventions (regulatory practices, algorithmic practices, etc.) is a new and increasingly important site of civic engagement to shift power. According to Isin and Ruppert (2015: 180), to conclude that digital rights can be delivered by laws alone 'is to neglect that the daily enactment of rights in cyberspace is a necessary but not sufficient guarantee. Conversely, to think that the daily enactment of rights in cyberspace is the guarantee of freedom is to neglect that without inscription, enactment would not have its performative force.' This combination of online and offline action is a theme of several of the case study chapters in this book.

Hintz et al. (2019: 20) characterize digital citizenship as everyday cultural practices, social media exchange and economic transactions mediated by the platform economy and define digital citizenship as the 'performative self-enactment of digital subjects' (2019: 40). They distinguish their approach by conceptualizing digital citizenship as constituted as much by the actions of the state and corporate actors as by citizen agency. They note that 'the overarching focus in studies of digital citizenship is on users' action and digital agency' (2019: 31), including how people enact themselves as digital citizens (Isin and Ruppert 2015), and their effective use of digital access and literacy to enhance civic engagement (Mossberger et al. 2008) and to 'democratise civic and political participation and facilitate social inclusion' (Vivienne et al. 2016: 8). The cumulative effect of this, they argue, is that 'the concept of digital citizenship has an intrinsic connection with citizen empowerment' (Hintz et al. 2019: 31). 'Digital media, it is claimed (explicitly or implicitly), have allowed

us to raise our voices, be heard in social and public debate, and construct our role in society. This implies a democratizing trend in state–citizen relations, and therefore a power shift towards citizens’ (Hintz et al. 2019: 31).

However, Hintz et al. argue that digital citizenship studies also need to explore the ways that digital citizenship practices are limited and constrained by the digital practices of states and corporations in the context of what Zuboff (2015) has termed ‘surveillance capitalism’. The idea that social media facilitates corporate surveillance and the commodification of all digital acts ‘complicates dominant narratives celebrating social media platforms as sites for pleasure and play, as well as tools to be used for liberating purposes by a host of progressive social and political actors’ (Hintz et al. 2019: 9). This idea that digital citizenship is constituted not only by the agency of citizens but also by the actions of the state and corporations is central to the understanding of digital citizenship explored in this book.

State surveillance and disinformation

For many scholars of digital citizenship, a key turning point in the study of digital citizenship was the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Snowden revelations, which revealed the full extent of state and corporate engagement to the detriment of open democratic spaces online. The Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed how political parties were using Facebook surveillance to construct data profiles of citizens to covertly target them with content designed to manipulate their beliefs and voting behaviour (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison 2018; Nyabola 2018). Cambridge Analytica worked on the 2013 election in Kenya as well as on the 2016 Brexit referendum and Trump election. The Snowden revelation provided a torrent of evidence that the US, UK and South African governments were among those conducting mass surveillance of citizens’ mobile and internet communications – far exceeding their legal powers. The research that followed these media stories showed that states were making systematic use of mobile and social media surveillance to spy on citizens (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison 2018; Van Zyl 2016; Bosch and Roberts 2021). Governments classified as both authoritarian and liberal democratic were found to have engaged in extensive surveillance of their own and foreign citizens and in manipulation of electoral processes in ways that

violated constitutional rights to privacy of communication and that impinge on the space for digital citizenship (Nyabola 2018; Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison 2018; Zuboff 2019).

Evidence that states and corporations were tracking and recording digital citizenship caused some reorientation of research priorities and prompted a more critical stance from researchers and activists. Hintz et al. (2019) argued for a new realism about digital citizenship that was neither utopian nor dystopian, echoing earlier warnings from Mudhai (2009), Mare (2018) and Nyabola (2018) about the encroachment of the state into the digital social sphere.

The pervasive collection of citizens' mobile and internet communication by state security forces and by corporations, including Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, has quickly become a routine feature of civic life causing Hintz et al. to note that 'Digital citizenship is shaped by the increasing normalization of such monitoring' now that 'The tools that we use to enact and perform our citizenship are hosted by a small set of commercial platforms, provided by a highly concentrated business sector' (Hintz et al. 2019: 35). This inflection point has resulted in an emerging body of literature on digital citizenship that is much more critical than the majority of early studies and which now includes investigation of the multi-million dollar market supplying technologies to government agencies across the African continent for use in illegal surveillance of citizens (Roberts and Mohamed Ali 2019; Roberts, Mohamed Ali, Farahat, Oloyede and Mutung'u (2021)) as well as the power relationships reflected in what Freedom House (2018) have called a descent into digital authoritarianism (MacKinnon 2011; Freedom House 2018; Mare 2020; Roberts and Bosch 2021).

African digital citizenship

Oyedemi (2020) usefully builds on Mossberger et al.'s access-based definition of digital citizenship, arguing that in an increasingly digital world, access to the internet and the skills needed to make practical use of access have become important for effective participation in society. Oyedemi defines a digital citizen as 'someone with regular and flexible access to the Internet, the skills to apply this technology, and a regular use of the Internet for participation

and functioning in all spheres of the society' (Oyedemi 2020: 244). Oyedemi also moves the discussion about digital citizenship beyond access and use to include the issues of rights, equality and social justice. He argues that the use of the internet has become crucial for inclusive citizen participation in the economy and in social and civic life, and for the enrichment of democracy. He discusses at length how the internet has become a key resource for individuals to participate more effectively in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the community. By extension, he argues that citizenship is hampered if some people are unable to participate in society based on their lack of access. The key elements in Oyedemi's (2020) theory of digital citizenship are the ability to access and the skills to regularly and flexibly use the internet, the policies to make this possible and the issues of equitable access and inclusive participation, rights and social justice.

Emmanuel Chijioke Ogbonna (2018) provides a rare comparative analysis of digital citizenship across several African countries. Ogbonna focused on examples of digital citizenship enacted through social media in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Algeria before an in-depth analysis of Nigeria. Using examples including the viral #BringBackOurGirls campaign, Ogbonna argues that citizens who were previously excluded from the political sphere have found in social media an effective platform for information sharing, rapid communication, coordination and mobilization that allows citizens to bypass established political mechanisms. Ogbonna analyses the situated historical, political and sociocultural factors, including those that shape and limit digital citizenship. He concludes that while social media aids group formation and 'expands participatory space to corners hitherto shielded and previously unconnected' (2018: 42) and can contribute to deposing regimes, the 'fractured social order' cannot be mended by digital citizenship alone. The deeper structural challenge of creating sustainable power-sharing mechanisms remains even when regimes change and Ogbonna wants to see digital citizens move beyond protest to offer a 'viable policy pact' that addresses the root causes of Africa's socio-economic problems, including the weaponization of ethnic divisions by powerful elites to accumulate resources.

In her study of the 2015 #FeesMustFall campaign in South Africa, Tanja Bosch suggests that we see the social media platform Twitter as 'an emergent space of radical citizenship' (Bosch 2016: 170). She illustrates how citizens from different gender, class and ethnic backgrounds who would not otherwise

readily coalesce were able to come together on Twitter and use the affordances of the digital platform to make rights claims for social justice that mobilized opinion across the country and globally. For young South Africans who are largely disengaged from mainstream political parties, Twitter and the #FeesMustFall campaign made possible a form of 'participatory citizenship'. In the same volume, Viola C. Milton (2016) also considers the kind of digital citizenship being forged in a campaign to save public broadcasting in South Africa organized by the SOS Coalition. The coalition's online activities provided a platform for a range of actors to make claims and present policy proposals for the future of South Africa's public broadcasting including a range of legal, financial and technical concerns. Twitter was used to share information, mobilize opinion, organize offline protests and influence policy outcomes. The paper provides a glimpse into digital citizenship as an active practice that was successful in opening parliamentary hearings to the public and influencing policy.

There is an emerging literature on African digital citizenship that considers the role of ethnicity (Egbunike 2018) or cultural citizenship (Bosch 2021). Drawing on the citizenship literature, there is scope to consider African digital citizenship using the unbounded, flexible, hierarchical and multidimensional and overlapping forms of citizenship proposed by Ong (1999), Lister (2003), Isin and Wood (1999) and Nyamnjoh (2006). In approaching digital citizenship in Africa, the state may be an important reference point, but it may not be the most important aspect of citizenship. From these emerging perspectives, it is clearly possible to conceive of African digital citizenship as reflecting distinct and specific cultural, ethnic, religious or gender belongings or interests that may be national or sub-national in character. The ethnic element of digital citizenship in Africa is clearest in the case study chapters from Ethiopia and Nigeria.

This perspective resonates with the work of Isin and Wood (1999), who argued that the internet will present the possibility for new forms of politics and citizenship due to the disruption of the monopoly of nation state power and the foregrounding of new digital rights issues including digital access, privacy and surveillance. Isin and Wood envisage digital citizenship as a method for enhancing existing forms of citizenship by using digital tools to increase information sharing, civic participation, transparency and accountability. However, they also express concern about the use of technologies of surveillance

and biometric identification, citing early examples of biometric ID being used to govern citizens' access to social welfare and government services, and to moderate human behaviour. Isin and Wood concluded that technological citizenship was not only about the agency issues of 'how to harness new technologies for new forms of political enactment [but also] about how to limit the uses of technology that encroach upon civil and political rights' (Isin and Wood 1999: 159).

Critical perspectives on digital citizenship in Africa

Our initial literature review clarified that existing digital citizenship research focuses primarily on the Global North and predominantly uses conceptual lenses derived from the same geography. Most of the existing literature emphasizes the positive use of social media in enabling new possibilities for activism. We were motivated to conduct this project by a concern to better understand under what conditions it is possible to harness the positive affordances of digital technology for citizenship and social change. However, we were also motivated to understand the negative affordances of digital technologies for surveilling digital citizens, closing online civic space and otherwise limiting citizenship. This reflects Hintz et al.'s (2019) point that digital citizenship is constituted both by citizen agency and by the actions of the state and corporations. We were also concerned to capture the wider environmental factors (Ogbonna 2018) that shape the space for digital citizenship in Africa. This required more critical analysis than we found in the existing digital citizenship literature.

In his analysis of digital citizenship in Africa, Ogbonna (2018) reminds us that however useful social media is in providing new opportunities for citizen engagement in civic life, online activism is not a sufficient condition for transformational social change. Even if social media activism does play a role in regime change, the institutional, economic and political environment is likely to mean that change in political leadership at the top is insufficient to translate into the desired social, economic and political change. Although regime change was achieved in Tunisia and Egypt this has not led to the kind of transformational social change that digital activists called for. Mindful of this sober reality, the authors in this volume situate their analysis in the

relevant political, economic or social context to illustrate the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and post-independence realities.

In embarking on this project we were also motivated to better understand the extent to which digital citizenship in Africa was specifically digital and/or specifically African. Is online digital citizenship in Africa in any way different from offline citizenship in Africa? Do the affordances of digital technologies produce new forms of citizenship? Is digital citizenship in Africa different from digital citizenship elsewhere? Put otherwise, we wanted to interrogate – What is African about digital citizenship in Africa and what is digital about digital citizenship in Africa? Producing case studies from a range of African countries provided us with the possibility to learn whether the distinct colonial and post-colonial realities of African nations were reflected and reproduced in emerging forms of digital citizenship. We hoped that the case studies would also allow us to understand how the intersecting gender, ethnic and rural/urban power relations were mirrored or shattered by the migration of civic participation to online spaces.

Our previous work with the African Digital Rights Network has given us a keen interest in understanding more about how the space for digital citizenship was being opened and closed in each country. We wanted to understand more about the interrelationship of digital citizenship and digital authoritarianism: How do states respond to effective digital citizenship and how do digital citizens respond to effective digital repression? Although uptake of mobile and internet technologies has been rapid across Africa, access to digital technologies, digital connectivity and digital literacies has not been even or universal. As a result, we also were mindful to investigate what factors either block access to digital technologies altogether or prevent those with access from translating it into digital citizenship. The case studies contained in this book illuminate these questions.

Chapter summaries

The chapters in this book employ a range of case studies and theoretical reflections to extend the understanding of digital citizenship in Africa presented earlier. The authors of each chapter investigate how mobile and internet technologies are being used to both expand and limit digital citizenship

in countries across the continent. Each chapter features a distinct episode of contestation played out in digital space or using digital tools, drawing on different understandings of the concepts of digital citizenship discussed earlier, to interpret empirical examples of digital citizenship in the countries they have studied. Their recommendations for policy, practice and further research provide guidance for governments, civil society and academics alike.

In Chapter 2, Ojebode, Ojebuyi, Oladapo and Oosterom examine how ethnic-religious divisions can constrain or expand the space for digital citizenship in Nigeria. The authors illustrate how digital citizenship can be used to either unite citizens across ethnic-religious fault lines to confront injustice or divide them along ethnic-religious fault lines. They use two case studies, the #ENDSARS protests, which went viral globally and forced government action, and the #PantamiMustGo campaign, which divided citizens and extinguished pressure for change. The authors use the concept of resilience to describe how community members respond and recover from external shocks and show how citizens use digital media in ways that can either strengthen or weaken social security and resilience. They use this framing to show how the #ENDSARS movement confronted the state to promote citizen security and inclusion, while dynamics in the #PantamiMustGo campaign were such that it undermined resilience. These two campaigns of digital citizenship had very different outcomes: the #ENDSARS movement expanded the space of digital citizenship by building solidarity across ethnic-religious fault lines to secure concessions from the state; while the digital citizenship in the #PantamiMustGo campaign mobilized entrenched polemic positions that benefited the status quo.

In Chapter 3, Brhane and Eneyew explore digital citizenship in Ethiopia using the Zone9blogger and the #LetOurVoicesBeHeard campaigns. They draw on the work of Mamdani (1996) and Nyamnjoh (2006), who have argued that ethnicity is as important as nationality in African conceptions of citizenship. The authors construct their own understanding of Ethiopian digital citizenship, which they argue has been shaped by the country's ethnic hierarchy. The chapter shows how, in the period prior to 2005, the government provided an enabling environment for digital citizenship, which saw a rapid expansion of blogging and digital civic engagement, but after electoral losses in 2005, the government dramatically closed civic space, arrested critical bloggers and imposed a series of internet shutdowns. As the Oromo/Amhara protests

increased between 2015 and 2017, oppressed ethnic groups made increasingly sophisticated use of a range of digital technologies to make rights claims on the Tigrayan-dominated government. The incoming Abiy government of 2018 implemented many reforms, including media freedoms and releasing prisoners critical of the previous government, but also implemented many internet shutdowns to constrain the space for digital citizenship.

In Chapter 4, Anthonio and Roberts examine how authoritarian states are using internet shutdowns to limit digital citizenship especially during elections and protests. It is the success of digital citizenship making rights claims that results in states implementing internet shutdowns. It is often only when states feel threatened by citizen action that they react with internet shutdowns to curtail digital citizenship. The authors use case studies from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda to illustrate the diverse forms that internet shutdowns are now taking, the factors that motivate them and how they affect digital citizenship. The unintended impacts on the economy and national reputation are assessed alongside a range of new forms of digital citizenship developed to evade internet shutdowns as well as to monitor, mitigate and manage their effects. The authors show how the space for digital citizenship is a site of ongoing contestation. Internet shutdowns close the space for digital citizenship, but they are always partly evaded and never permanent – so the space of digital citizenship is always in permanent flux.

In Chapter 5, Ajaja uses the concept of cyberfeminism to extend our understanding of feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria, addressing a gap in the existing literature. The author explores the factors that contribute to the significant increase in women's digital citizenship in Nigeria. By analysing the case studies of #BBOG and #ENDSARS through a unique conceptual framework, three factors are identified as increasing feminist digital citizenship: increased rights violations, increased access to digital technologies and the safety afforded by online spaces for feminist digital citizenship. The opening of digital spaces allowed feminists to organize, rehearse resistance and provide leadership for both online and offline campaigns. This incidence of African feminist digital citizenship took the form of agency-based rights-claiming to demand accountability and government action to end social injustices. The author argues that the resulting form of feminist digital citizenship was qualitatively different from and significantly more successful than the street demonstrations that preceded it and which failed to secure government

action. It is argued that digital spaces were central to enabling feminist voice and leadership to develop outside of offline patriarchal civic spaces and that digital communication tools enabled their rights-claiming #hashtag campaigns to reach a global audience unmediated by patriarchal media channels. The chapter shows that constraining structures of patriarchy limited women's citizenship but that increased technology access and solidarity across gender and ethnic divisions rapidly expanded the space of digital citizenship and secured concessions from the state.

In Chapter 6, Phiri, Abraham and Bosch analyse digital citizenship in Zambia to document how activists have used digital tools creatively to expand the space for digital citizenship alongside an expanding series of technological, legal and policing efforts to constrain the space for digital citizenship. The authors focus on three case studies using the theoretical frame of dromology to argue for a conception of rights-claiming citizenship constituted by the exercise of performative actions and struggles with the state over the control of digital space. This chapter argues that the space for digital citizenship is contested on three fronts which the authors explore in turn: technologies, tactics and laws.

In Chapter 7, Elias and Roberts analyse the emergence of digital citizenship in Namibia ahead of the November 2019 elections and assess its relevance for political accountability. The chapter focuses on the use of electronic petitions and social media to open up digital spaces for citizenship not dominated by legacy media and gerontocratic politicians. The investments made in social media campaigns by the main political parties in the election suggest that they judged this new digital public sphere to be increasing in importance. Despite increased mobile internet access, digital citizenship was only possible for 30 percent of the population at the time of the election. Namibian digital citizens used social media platforms to call the government to account for its record on youth unemployment and state corruption. Although the use of social media technologies amplified digital citizens' claim-making in online space, they had only limited success in translating this increased 'voice' into the 'teeth' necessary to secure accountability. Online petitions and campaigns around voting machines did not produce any response from the government. However, two weeks before the election, WikiLeaks released 30,000 files exposing a ten-million-dollar corruption scandal dubbed #FishRot on Twitter. The combination of mainstream media and digital citizenship resulted in the

resignation of the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Fisheries. Digital citizenship will be more significant in Namibia's next elections in 2023 and 2027. The outcomes will not be determined by technology, but they will amplify the agency and potential of digital citizens and political parties alike.

In Chapter 8, Nanjala Nyabola calls for a decolonisation of the language of digital citizenship. She reminds us that the academic and policy debates about digital rights and citizenship take place predominantly in colonial languages, so those speaking African languages are excluded and silenced. This epistemological violence is evidenced by the overwhelming dominance of English on the internet platforms, journals and other media that host digital rights debates. Nyabola provides deep reflections on the historical and political construction of colonial language domination in Africa and on the internet alongside the dynamic and fertile evolution of indigenous languages, dialects and slang. The largest and fastest-growing African language is Kiswahili, with eighty-two million speakers, yet there are no words for key digital rights terms like 'data protection' or 'surveillance', making it practically impossible for millions of people to make rights claims in their own language about issues shaping their digital lives. The chapter shows how digital citizenship is effectively constrained by colonial structures and provides a practical example of decolonisation in which Kiswahili speakers literally change the terms of the debate.

Conclusion

This book provides the first compilation of case studies of digital citizenship in Africa. We hope that other scholars will build on this modest start by adding new case studies from countries not represented in this first edition. The book provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of digital citizenship in Africa and the implications of citizen agency, access and affordances as well as state and corporate enabling and constraints. This section draws some tentative conclusions and recommendations.

Digital citizenship in Africa is distinctive by virtue of its distinct history, political settlements, institutions and cultural specificity. Its colonial legacy, post-independence politics and the cultural distinctiveness of ethnic, religious and language composition in African countries are reflected in specific forms

of digital citizenship. The rich case studies and critical analysis provided in this volume show that it is not possible to copy an understanding of digital citizenship from the Global North and paste it uncritically onto any African country.

Based on the lessons from the Nigerian case study, we argue that not all digital citizenship is progressive or desirable. If we define digital citizenship without a normative dimension – as any online civic engagement – then digital acts calling for the violation of the rights of other ethnic groups, genders or sexualities would qualify as digital citizenship. For this reason, we argue for a normative definition of *transformative digital citizenship* that goes beyond signifying any online political or civic engagement to include an explicit commitment to social justice and human rights. To this end, we define transformative digital citizenship as the use of digital technologies in an active process of claiming rights and the pursuit of social justice.

Our second key point derived from the case studies in this project, is that digital citizenship in Africa is a contested terrain in constant dynamic flux, due to the agency of multiple actors and competing interests. All spaces are comprised of power relationships, and digital spaces are no exception. The spaces in which digital citizenship in Africa takes place, open and close in proportion to the agency of citizens and structures of constraint and opportunity. Arising from the analysis of this dialectic, a number of recommendations arise for policy, practice and further research. For governments, funders and civil-society organizations, decisions about whether to invest in structures of opportunity or structures of constraint are critical policy choices. The main lesson for practice is the need to engage proactively in creating and expanding online civic space.

Finally, we argue that digital citizenship needs to be constantly exercised, defended and extended, or it may be lost. Citizens have increasing access to digital technologies, but this access is stratified by a range of barriers that create digital divides between citizens and either enhance or restrict a person's capability for digital citizenship. Citizens who have access to digital technologies need to make effective use of them in acts of citizenship that help open up wider spaces for digital citizenship. If they do not, the space is likely to shrink or be shut down.

Further research is necessary in countries not represented in this first edition, as well as studies to identify additional factors impinging on the scope

of transformational digital citizenship in Africa. As the two Nigerian chapters illustrate, the experience of digital citizenship varies not only between but within countries and over time. This fluidity of digital citizenship over space/time is a significant finding emerging from this study and supports Nyamnjoh's contention (in the 'Foreword' of this volume and elsewhere) that more flexible concepts of citizenship are required. It also suggests that future research on digital citizenship in Africa needs to be contextually situated. Future studies should seek to understand more about the implications of digital citizenship in Africa taking place on platforms owned by foreign multinationals. As the data captured by social media platforms, mobile phone companies and state agencies are increasingly used to calculate and channel access to social protection payments and government services, future research attention will need to be directed at 'algorithmic citizenship'. This volume is guilty of an overemphasis of social media in digital citizenship; future research should include the role of other digital technologies such as civic tech, radio and participatory video in digital citizenship.

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